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3 TEST REPORTS

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CQ-DFX972U
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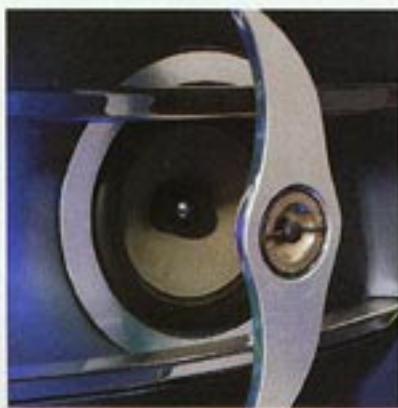
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BAVARIAN BANGER

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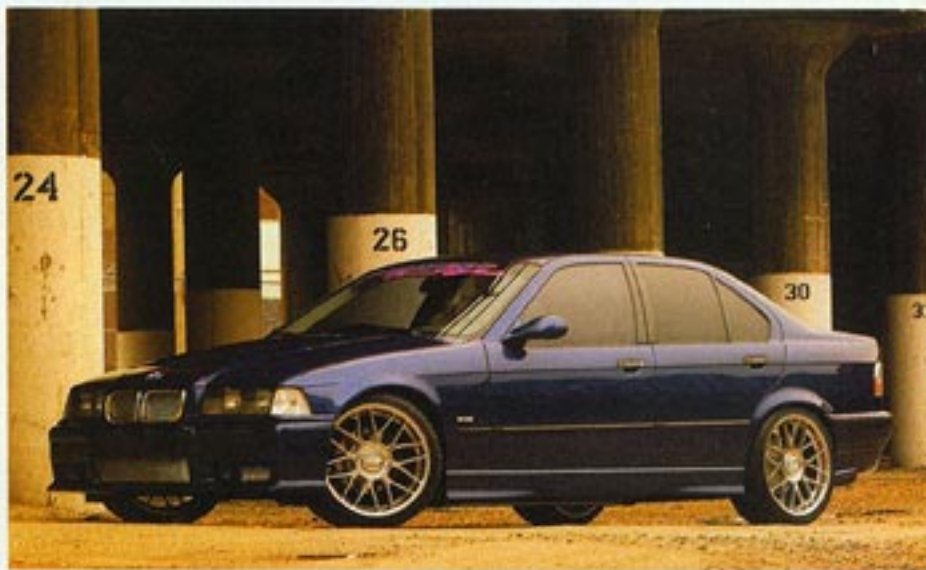
Neil Lombardozi is banging out the beats in his modified BMW 328

BY • ROB MCPHERSON
PHOTOGRAPHY • CARL EDWARDS



What's a young man to do? With some money in the bank and a passion for performance, nineteen-year-old Neil Lombardozi knew exactly what to do — buy a new car and equip it with enough gear to make his own mom shake her head. Ah yes, quite the rebel Neil is.

His mum should be proud, though. Neil sourced out a great retail/installation facility and made some key decisions when choosing product and what the installers could and could not get away with. Though young, Neil refrained from allowing the installers to cut his fine new Bimmer up. While they wanted to get a little crazy, Neil had to pull them back to reality and keep it simple. About all the installers got (after much debate) was the opportunity to remove the spare tire to make room for product. Still, I don't think Neil's mom will be picking him up off the side of the road for a flat.





Fortunately for Neil's mother, she never had anything to worry about in the first place. Sound Decision in Montgomery, Illinois has a reputation to uphold. Master installers Sean "Crackle" Young and Brian Mobley are too skilled and respectful to resort to cheap tactics like hacking the kid's brand new BMW. So rather than build in (read, dig in), the team decided to utilize available space, including the

Hard to miss the Panasonic CQ-DVR7000U head unit that resides in the factory dash location... that is if you can peel your eyes away from the custom edge lit (w/blue neon) door inserts around the speakers and door handles.

spare tire well. While mostly a custom theme, little was done to bastardize the car. Instead, custom panels were built on top of the car's interior frame.

Though a highlighted installation, the signal source is kept rear with a Panasonic CQ-DVR7000U in the factory dash location. The brain for this unit is neatly stashed in the trunk; not even visible through the wall of bubbles that dominates. We'll touch on

that later, as it is almost a story in itself. Lower in the dash, below the AC controls, are LED voltage gauge and water temperature gauge. Also, two switches are mounted in the ergonomic location.

Let's take a look at each of the 328's four doors. Using 1/4-inch Plexiglas and 1/32-inch brushed aluminum, custom grilles were fabricated to house 4-inch mid-range and tweeter from the Focal Utopia 165W3 3-way component set. The factory door panels are used and just slightly modified to make way for the custom grille work highlighted with chill neon

"The brain for this unit is neatly stashed in the trunk; not even visible through the wall of bubbles that dominates."



lighting. After the grilles and door handle inserts were fabricated, sanded and polished, and the door panels prepped to accept, the panels were covered in two-tone ultra-leather. At ninety-bucks a yard they can afford to call it "ultra."

Rather than get nuts with a custom build-out for the remaining component speaker, a 6-inch Focal, the factory kick panel location was perfectly suited and required minimal effort for the mounting. Only the requisite detail work such as better-than-stock mounting and damping touch-up. Stinger 16-gauge twisted pair speaker wire was used to flow audio signal from the Focal 165W3 passive crossover to the amplifiers. For consistency, the rear doors received the same treatment as the front, less the speakers. In fact, this team opted to forgo rear fill altogether. Now that's my kind of installation.

No rearfill aside, the installation team spared no expense with the rear deck. Playing off the Von Dutch "Flying Eyeball" theme, a BMW "roundel" is flanked by a pair of wings

Above: Just below the Panasonic source unit and A/C controls are two LED gauges; one for voltage while the other displays water temperature. Between the gauges are the system and neon switches.

Right: Even the oddest places display with great detail. A custom aluminum grill, done with the Focal insignia, is only seen when the rear seat armrest is folded down. The rear deck takes BMW's "roundel" flanked by a pair of wings to a new dimension as they serve as the sub enclosure's port.



serving as the sub-enclosure's port. Plexiglas was used to create the "flying roundel" with extensive use of neon to get the correct lighting. The wings off the eyeball are there for more than just effect, they serve as the deck-vent with two 4-inch Plexiglas ports firing upward. Though the stock rear deck was retained, it was reworked with dyna-glass and body filler. After hours of sanding and shaping the deck was covered in uber-plush ultra-suede.

Just below the rear deck through the rear bench armrest is a taste of the trunk. A single 15-inch Focal Utopia 38WX is exposed with custom aluminum grille. It took a Plexi face and more neon lighting to give the effect of a blue abyss.

Something's Fishy

At this point, before we get into the technique of the trunk, I think it's fair to let you in on a little something. Something fishy. After spending some time in the infamous Fish Camp with renowned and totally nuts installer Dave "Fishman" Rivera, Sean became inspired. Fishman's installations are inspiring, no doubt. After a string of installations that involved live fish throughout the early nineties, Fishman has become known as one of the most creative and, ahem, lively installers in the world. So much that his talent has afforded an acclaimed installation training center, Fish Camp, and a line of hard-to-find installation materials. Fishman and his trusty sidekick, Maddog, run the program which is rapidly becoming the choice education for installers who want to get serious.

Not only did Sean find inspiration from Fish Camp, he found new materials and techniques that he was eager to put to use. He was also eager to share his newfound knowledge with his partner, Brian. Take a look into the truck of this sport sedan and you'll see an exploration of, well, Fishism.





The rear deck-lid itself sports some concepts that are on the cutting edge of installation. Configured to be used as an external entertainment system, it incorporates a 10.4-inch monitor flanked by Focal 2-way component speakers. Getting heavy with the Plexiglas and aluminum, Sean and Brian created a display of floating components with no exposed wiring. Two 1/2-inch diameter Plexiglas rails

seems to work well enough for external, parking lot playback.

While an exciting in-your-face display, the installation team didn't overlook the practical stuff. The original deck lid was reworked in much of the same fashion as the rear deck. Using resin and body filler, a custom panel was fabricated to house the 5.25-inch Focals just in behind of the floating tweeters. The new panel was covered

An X-Box, insane aluminum amp rack, neon, two highly polished Sinfoni amps and a sub-woofer enclosure with pseudo fishtank. What more could you ask for? Bubbles?

the desired effect being a neo-retro display of product. And though the effect was achieved, it must have been a trying process to get two aluminum bars to perfectly match and fit as they do here.

At each side of the trunk, mounted to the aluminum bars, are Sinfoni amplifiers. These highly polished and high-end amplifiers eagerly power the system with the 90.2X 2-way amplifier powering the front 3-way system and another 90.2X bridged mono for 550-watts to a single 15-inch Focal Utopia 38WX. A hidden 45.2X powers the 2-way deck lid system.

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that have brushed aluminum on both sides extend from side to side acting as a mount for the monitor and tweeters. While these rails are a solid mount for the tweeters and monitor, they also serve as the signal conductor for the tweeters. Rather than attempting to sneak in speaker wire, it was reasoned that aluminum strips could serve a stylish, yet functional aspect of the installation. I don't know how acoustically pure aluminum is, but it

in the same 2-tone ultra leather found throughout the installation. Stinger 16-gauge speaker wire made the 5.25-inch connection.

In the well of the trunk, where the spare tire once resided, is a killer execution of amplifier and X-Box mounting. Like the deck lid, rails, this time polished aluminum, extend across the trunk in a wave-like form. These bars had to be painstakingly formed and polished to get the desired effect,





An interesting concept in designing the enclosure was the selection process. Rather than deciding on a woofer brand and size then building the enclosure to spec, the team built the enclosure first to best fit the car and then choose a woofer that best matched the final product. In this case a single 15-inch Focal Utopia 38WX was a perfect match. Using 3/4-inch MDF for the top and bottom of the box and two layers of 3/8-inch Fishman "bendy wood" form the sides. After the enclosure was sealed-up it was coated with fiberglass resin for strength and airtight operation. The entire interior of the enclosure was flocked and highlighted with blue neon to reach for effect.

Fishman influence becomes obvious when the bubbler is turned on. Yes, the installers went for a water wall completely hand-made using two sheets of Plexiglas and a custom bubbler system. This is one of those things that make an installation stand out from others because it is simply whacked. It is easy on the eyes, but took the installers for a ride as they



put to use 3-gallons of water, and a grip of aquarium products that took some experimenting to get to work properly. In the end, the effect pays off. Rather than a simple clear enclosure back, the bubble wall makes for a surreal viewing of the trunk.

However, to properly integrate the package it took the installation crew literally hundreds of hours of sanding and forming all trunk panels to finish the installation. Each panel has been hand formed and covered in 2-tone ultra-leather. In fact, the seats, A-pillars, C-pillars headliner and all interior and trunk panels were re-covered by Dave and Sally Schober of Schober's Trim and Upholstery in Montgomery Illinois.

To complete the project, Neil had to make

some exterior modification as well. An E-36 M3 front end was borrowed from a donor car, and euro clear corners and tail lights replaced the stock US edition products. 18-inch BBS wheels tucked in with H&R sport springs give the car an aggressive stance and compliant ride. Getting the power to the ground is the factory 2.8-liter inline six modified with sport air intake, custom exhaust, ceramic headers and tuned air mass sensor. Neil hopes to add a supercharger soon. Suweet!

Neil's mom hasn't totally forgiven him yet, but his friends sure like the car. In fact, it won the World of Wheels event and is the highlight of many area car shows and events. Fishman and Maddog should be proud, too. After a week of training Sean found the inspiration he was lacking before. I have an idea. Why don't we introduce Fishman to Neil's mom so she appreciates the enthusiasm that stems from the world of high-end car audio? ☼

Open the trunk and get your joysticks ready! The rear of Neil's BMW was designed for some external entertainment. A 10.4" monitor encased by aluminum sits centered in the open trunk lid. To the left and right are Focal component speakers; while the 6.5" mid-woofers are fixed to a fiberglass panel, the tweeters are mounted atop two aluminum and Plexiglas rails. Rather than using speaker wire, the aluminum rails serve as signal conductors for the tweeters.

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